

Massachusetts Commission for the Blind (MCB)

2017 ANNUAL REPORT

**Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Executive Office of Health and Human Services**



Massachusetts Commission for the Blind

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Table of Contents

Letter from the Commissioner	1
Commissioner’s Reflection	2
General Updates	4
Key Accomplishments	10
Consumer Highlights	12

MCB Mission Statement

The Massachusetts Commission for the Blind (MCB) provides the highest quality rehabilitation and social services to approximately 26,000 individuals in the Commonwealth who are blind, leading to independence and full community participation. MCB accomplishes this critical mission by working in partnership with consumers who are legally blind, families, community agencies, health care providers and employers.

History

MCB, the second oldest public agency for the blind in the country, was established in 1906 with two mandates: to “ameliorate” the conditions that are the result of legal blindness; and to keep a register of all legally blind persons in the Commonwealth. The founders, comprised of three men and two women including Ms. Helen Keller, functioned as a board of directors, which was charged with establishing a state agency to provide services to blind persons. The original agency was organized primarily around two residential workshops for the blind, one for men, and the other for women. In 1919, it was incorporated into the State Department of Education and later renamed the Division of the Blind. In 1966, the agency was reestablished as a separate commission. MCB is currently an agency in the Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS).

While the word “ameliorate” is still part of MCB’s statute, it is not often used. To ameliorate means to make a problem better or at least less painful. Blindness has come a long way since MCB was founded. Individuals began using long white canes beginning in 1931. From there, the first life-changing, but still primitive, assistive technology converting text to speech came about in 1975. In 2009, MCB’s last sheltered workshops were closed. These and many other advances along with the agency’s incredibly capable staff allow most of MCB’s consumers to regain productive independence, surmounting blindness as a problem.



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Dear Friends,

MCB's performance – in 2017, and in every year since our establishment in 1906 – is rooted in excellent rehabilitation services provided to our consumers by the agency's dedicated staff and collaborative efforts with our non-profit partners. In order to allow our consumers to regain their productive independence while adjusting to their vision loss, we continually analyze the effectiveness of our service delivery. One important way to do that is to communicate effectively with our consumers, which includes listening and sharing.

You will read about a one-page survey that was mailed to every MCB consumer. Our goal is to obtain as many email addresses as possible, which will allow us to communicate with our consumers electronically in a more-timely and efficient manner. You will also read about a State-wide initiative to make our website more accessible, user-friendly, and easier to navigate.

In addition to agency updates, key accomplishments, and consumer successes, this report offered me an opportunity to reflect on my 4 and ½ years as Commissioner. It is truly a privilege to be a public servant. I hope you enjoy reading this third annual MCB report and I look forward to your continued involvement and support of MCB.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "PAS", written over a light blue circular background.

Paul Saner,
Commissioner

Commissioner's Reflection



I am grateful to work among such a dedicated staff of professionals, who share a common belief in the capacity of blind and deaf-blind people to achieve their most ambitious goals and dreams made possible by excellent vision rehabilitation services. As the first outsider to be appointed Commissioner since the early 1980s, initially my focus was to evaluate the services provided and to hear from consumers, staff, and stakeholders. This approach enabled me to reflect on what the agency has done in the past, and I used these insights to inform how we as an organization can best serve our diverse consumer population into the future. I determined early on that key adjustments needed to be made with respect to how services are funded, as well as in the areas of collaboration and communication, both within the agency and externally. While collaboration and consistent communication have become key values within the agency, we still need to undertake additional important adjustments. We continue to utilize case data and financial analyses to meet changing demographic needs and opportunities

MCB aims to take advantage of opportunities to work in conjunction with other state agencies. We have worked collaboratively with the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education to update a more than 30-year-old Memorandum of Understanding. We have also completed data shares for the first time with the Department of Developmental Services, the Department of Mental Health, and MassHealth, with additional data shares planned. Collaboration within state government has led to initiatives such as: better coordinated employment for shared consumers; special education technical advisory releases; the re-establishment of the Braille Literacy Advisory Council; and the increased promotion of the White Cane Safety Law by the Registry of Motor Vehicles. Additionally, MCB has heavily emphasized genuine collaboration in the provision of services to seniors. A grant funded by the Executive Office of Elder Affairs to the Massachusetts Council of Aging with MCB's active involvement resulted in the establishment of three free assistive technology training centers located in Brookline, Franklin, and Worcester. We are also currently working with MassHealth on being the first in the nation to cover specialized vision rehabilitation services for seniors. In addition to these state government initiatives, MCB is working cooperatively with many of Massachusetts' well-established non-profits that provide direct services to consumers. As an example, the grand opening of the Massachusetts Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired VIBRANT program at the Brookline Senior Center is highlighted in this annual report.

MCB has expanded eligibility for services. With the support of the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission, we are now providing vocational rehabilitation services to those with low vision due to a condition leading to legal blindness. Additionally, after collaborating with the Perkins School for the Blind on a two-day symposium about Cortical Visual Impairment (CVI), our registration policy for those with functional blindness such as CVI has been clarified.

The new Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act has required that more of our federal vocational rehabilitation funding is directed to pre-employment transition services for students. In response, MCB has funded many new programs provided by the Carroll Center for the Blind, Lowell Association for the Blind, Perkins, and the Polus Center for Social and Economic Development. MCB has expanded internship opportunities for consumers seeking employment, and continues to seek innovative internship programming. The Perkins Business Partnership has broken down barriers to employment by increasing employers' awareness about blindness, and has led to even more active employment-related coordination amongst MCB, Carroll, and Perkins. This coordination allowed for the recent formation of the Vision Works Consortium, which is highlighted in this report.

A lot has also been going on behind the scenes. MCB has migrated to a new client management system. Policies have been updated and procedures, where lacking, have been implemented. The rate at which MCB contracts for various services has been reset. This includes the Deaf Blind Community Access Network, and has resulted in the first increase in 15 years. At the national level, I chair the National Council of State Agencies for the Blind's Independent Living Older Blind committee. This collaboration includes the American Foundation for the Blind, Vision Serve Alliance, the National Research and Training Center on Blindness and Low Vision, and other prominent national organizations concerned about the static federal funding for the Older Blind program.

With the help of listening sessions from across the Commonwealth and my participation in consumer conferences, MCB has made communication a two-way street. We turned an internal newsletter celebrating consumer success stories outward to share with our consumers, advocates, and providers. We are also fortunate to have two statutorily required advisory boards comprised of new members who have relevant professional and personal experiences, which provide us with on-going invaluable advice. Communication is also stressed internally, as this is the foundation to collaborative and productive teamwork toward fulfilling our shared mission.



General Updates

VIBRANT Assistive Technology Program

For individuals with a visual impairment, technology can play a significant role in providing access to information and resources, and to fostering their independence. From creating a Facebook page, to being able to hail a ride using Uber/Lyft, to downloading apps to keep them organized and pay bills on time, to using a service that narrates navigation while walking, and even being able to tell the color of a piece of clothing or denomination of money without human assistance – technology can be a game-changer.

MCB and its program partners, the Massachusetts Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired (MABVI), the Executive Office of Elder Affairs, and the Massachusetts Association of Councils on Aging and Senior Center Directors (MCOA), are playing their part by collaborating to provide free access to assistive technology. This partnership has created the opening of several regional assistive technology training centers across the Commonwealth. Plans are underway to open a new center in Natick in 2018.



The VIBRANT (Visually Impaired and Blind Recipients Accessing New Technology) Program currently offers one-on-one training for individuals who are blind and visually impaired in regional centers in Brookline, Franklin, and Harwich. VIBRANT was created to identify, assess and evaluate social rehabilitation consumers, and to provide access and training to technology that helps them meet their goals. Each site also has a designated program coordinator, who is responsible for program oversight, recruiting volunteer trainers, and forming community partnerships. VIBRANT is using assistive technology to provide individuals with access to print information, hard-copy or digital media that they can enlarge and read. The program teaches seniors how to better manage their time via note-taking and other organizational skills in order to effectively complete tasks such as paying bills and online banking. VIBRANT is helping individuals to navigate the world of transportation with information and apps that allow seniors to participate in leisure and recreational activities.

Like most of us, older adults learn best when they are in a one-on-one, hands-on, show-and-tell setting where they are most comfortable. VIBRANT helps foster this.

To inquire about an assistive technology assessment, find a program near you, or become a volunteer trainer, please call 617-879-0771 or email ATCenter@mabcommunity.org.

White Cane Safety Public Service Announcement (PSA)

MCB held a series of consumer listening sessions from October 2015 through March 2016. At several of these sessions, concerns were raised by MCB consumers about the lack of awareness and enforcement of the Massachusetts White Cane Law. Consequently, MCB and the Registry of Motor Vehicles (RMV) discussed ways to collaborate to better educate the driving public on this issue. In 2017, the RMV continued its collaborative efforts with MCB by using several communication mediums to promote white cane safety.

The RMV included white cane flyers in two separate 2017 mailings: September mailings that included October expirations; and October mailings which included December expirations. The RMV understands the importance of white cane awareness and that renewal mailings can be used as a platform to reach thousands of motor vehicle operators. The RMV also ran PSAs on electronic billboards on Routes 90, 93, 495, and 24, as well as played it for 746 hours at local RMV branches in September and October. The RMV's twitter account (@MassRMV) posted 6 tweets in October for White Cane Awareness Month. These activities culminated in an October electronic newsletter article on White Cane Awareness Month that included ten tips about what motorists should do when they see a pedestrian using a white cane or dog guide.

A continued challenge for MCB is identifying opportunities that allow the agency to promote the White Cane Law year-round. Fortunately, as a result of the flyers on white cane safety that were included in the RMV's registration renewal mailings, MCB was contacted by the Mansfield Cable Access Corporation to explore promoting white cane safety. Working with Mansfield Cable Access, MCB produced a PSA to promote white cane safety and the Massachusetts White Cane Law. You can access the PSA by via the attached link:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mJbK7zo-1AY&feature=em-share_video_user

MCB is encouraging consumers and stakeholders to assist in promoting this important issue by sharing this PSA with your community's cable access stations, high schools, driving schools, senior centers, and local newspapers.

Statutory Advisory Board (SAB)

MCB's founding statute requires that the agency establish an advisory board. The Statutory Advisory Board (SAB), as it is referred to, consists of five people, qualified by training, experience, or demonstrated interest in the services for individuals who are blind. The SAB members are appointed by the Secretary of the Executive Office



of Health and Human Services (EOHHS), with the approval of the Governor's Office, for a term of five years and meets monthly with the Commissioner on matters pertaining to services for citizens of Massachusetts who are blind.

In October 2017, there was a changing of the guard, as the previous five SAB members' term expired and new members were sworn in. The five new members (Joseph Abely, Kim Charlson, Dr. Susan Foley, Christopher Kauders and Amy Ruell) have a wealth of complementary professional and non-profit experience, both locally and nationally, which is directly relevant to the agency's mission. Three of the new members are registered as consumers who are legally blind. MCB extends gratitude to the individuals who volunteered their time on the SAB in previous years and present.

Rehabilitation Council

The Rehabilitation Council (RC) is a federally mandated advisory body consisting of 15 members with representation from: The Statewide Independent Living Council; a parent training and information center; the Client Assistance Program; a community rehabilitation program service provider; a disability advocacy group; the business, industry and labor sectors; and the state educational agency and the state workforce investment board. Throughout the year, MCB worked on nominating members to the SRC to ensure compliance and balanced representation from across the required areas. Among those who have joined the RC are: Richard Curtis, Vice President of Global Inclusion/Workforce Development at State Street Bank; Lydia Greene, Senior Vice President, Chief Human Resources Officer at Tufts Health Plan; and Charles Curti, Director of Human Resources at Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study at Harvard University. The SRC is chaired by Bruce Howell, Accessibility Services Manager at Carroll Center for the Blind.

RC members are considered the voice of consumers receiving Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) services. Roles include but are not limited to: advocating for the VR program to the public; working in partnership with MCB to maximize employment and independent living; and taking an advisory role in the preparation of the VR state plan.

MCB's RC was instrumental in the preparation of the Massachusetts Combined State Plan as required by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). The members volunteer their time to review MCB's goals and priorities and provide valuable feedback.

MCB Website Redesign

On October 17, 2017, the Baker-Polito Administration announced the launch of the new Mass.gov website, now equipped to better meet the needs of thousands of constituents visiting it on a daily basis. The website has been in design and development stages since late 2016 and has been improved through pilot tests, user research, and public feedback over the last several months.

MCB's newly redesigned website, once completed, will be more accessible, responsive, flexible, and allows for easier navigation. MCB's website will work well with both high-speed connections and pay-as-you-go wireless data plans. It will have better functionality on more devices than the previous version. New standards implemented on the site will also make search results richer, and will include information like addresses, phone numbers, and hours of operation.

The new Mass.gov is designed to be accessible for everyone — including people who are blind who navigate the Internet with a keyboard and listen to screen readers, as well as elderly people and those with visual impairments who need high contrast and large text to read. A modern digital website will better serve these important parts of our community.



Key strategies to continuously improve Mass.gov over time include:

- Dashboards that give the Commonwealth continuous feedback from constituents about how web content performs so that organizations can be proactive and methodical about making improvements.
- Open source technology used by many large companies and universities. Now when other organizations make improvements, Massachusetts can leverage these innovations too.
- The ability to publish content in formats usable by developers. This means state organizations, cities and towns, and third-party developers will be able to build apps and integrations with the state's platform; also, innovations can be smaller, faster, and cheaper.

One Page Survey to Consumers

In an effort to maximize how efficiently and effectively MCB communicates with its consumers, the agency sent out a one-page survey to all registered consumers on Thursday, October 12, 2017. Consumers were asked to provide/confirm their email address as well as identify email addresses of family members and/or friends who would receive information on their behalf.

Returned surveys helped MCB to identify and increase the number of consumer email addresses. This will allow MCB to share its electronic newsletter, *MCB News*, provide agency updates to consumers and stakeholders, and distribute this Annual Report electronically. MCB is always looking for ways to ensure that consumers receive agency updates in the most timely and cost-effective manner.

If you recently obtained a new email address or changed yours, please send an email to OfficeOfTheCommissioner@MassMail.State.MA.US.

Visions of Collaboration Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) Conference – June 2017

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) mandates Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) agencies to collaborate with local educational agencies and other stakeholders to provide, or arrange for the provision of, pre-employment transition services (Pre-ETS) for all students with disabilities in need of such services. MCB's Pre-ETS services commence at age 14 and continue through age 21.

In Massachusetts, there are more than 350 local school districts, in addition to numerous independent private school organizations. This vast number of institutions makes collaboration as mandated by WIOA challenging. To ensure students with disabilities receive services, MCB held a statewide conference referred to as "Visions of Collaborations" in June with approximately 125 professionals in attendance. MCB hosted an earlier regional conference, however, there was a call for a statewide forum where Pre-ETS information could be discussed and disseminated on a larger scale. At the "Visions of Collaboration" conference, valuable information was disseminated and attendees were trained about the provision of Pre-ETS services to ensure that referrals are made for those individuals who need services. The conference also sought to improve partnerships and enhance coordination between MCB as the VR agency, Teachers of the Visually Impaired (TVIs), Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialists, local school district Special Education representatives and a representative from Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE).

The morning panel discussion entitled *“Working with and Supporting Parents”* explored how VR counselors and Pre-Employment Transition counselors can work effectively with school administrations, including special education representatives, to support families with service provision to students. This was followed by presentations from MCB Children’s Service Workers, Pre-Employment Transition counselors, as well as the VR, Deaf Blind Extended Supports, Orientation & Mobility, and Assistive Technology departments. The discussion centered on: seamless transition to post-school training/employment within the VR program for eligible consumers; and referrals into the VR programs in general. Another panel discussion was entitled *“Creating access to technology and computer science for students with visual impairments.”* This panel discussion explored the intersection of Pre-ETS and STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) careers. The conference concluded with a challenge to the attendees to seek tangible solutions for effective collaborations to ensure that students with disabilities who are eligible or potentially eligible for Pre-ETS services not only have access, but also utilize the services.

The 2018 Conference will be held on Thursday, March 22nd, at the Holiday Inn in Marlborough, Massachusetts.

BlindNewWorld

On Monday, March 6, 2017, Governor Baker issued his first-ever proclamation in braille at the Massachusetts State House. The ceremony kicked off BlindNewWorld Week: six-days dedicated to creating more inclusion and opportunity for the 125,000 Massachusetts residents with vision loss.

BlindNewWorld is the first-ever blindness awareness social change campaign, sponsored by Perkins School for the Blind.

It aims to demystify blindness and break down the barriers to inclusion – discomfort, pity, fear, and stigma. Through provocative Public Service Announcement (PSA) mini-films, new statistics on public attitudes, compelling stories and social dialogue, BlindNewWorld seeks to disrupt stereotypes and inspire the sighted population to open its eyes to the full social, professional, and academic capabilities of the blind population. During BlindNewWorld Week, various partners promoted and celebrated new and proactive ways to think about inclusion in various settings including employment, education, innovation, and transportation. In the spirit of BlindNewWorld’s mission, which is all about inclusion, kindness, and open-mindedness, individuals with visual impairments were encouraged to invite sighted individuals out on the town – and vice versa. The successful campaign reached more than 1.3 million people, generated more than 2.9 million impressions, and had hundreds of engagements, connecting with people across Massachusetts and beyond. Partners of the initiative were pleased, and all said that they gained new perspectives on blindness. You can learn more by visiting www.blindnewworld.org.



Key Accomplishments

- MCB's summer internship program is a long-established job preparation model that supports college-age and nontraditional students, all of whom are legally blind, to acquire work experience. In 2017, the program reached its 14th year and involved 84 participants. MCB consumers Dr. Linda Bolle, Clinical Psychologist, and Amy Ruell, President of the National Federation of the Blind of Massachusetts (NFBMA) and MCB Statutory Advisory Board (SAB) member, were the featured speakers at the opening and closing ceremonies, respectively. During the program's 14-year span, there have been approximately 800 internship opportunities with 400 private and public business partners.
- Members of the MCB Matter of Balance Team were recognized as the 2017 Northeast Chapter of the Association for the Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired (NE/AER) Team Award winners at the 2017 NE/AER Conference in Burlington, Vermont on November 15, 2017. This award recognizes the work of teams of NE/AER members which substantially benefits individuals who are blind and visually impaired in the northeast area. The NE/AER Team Award pays tribute to members who work together to collaborate on significant professional projects. Teams can be as small as two individuals, or larger. To qualify for nomination, either the leadership or a majority of the members of the team must be AER members. Members of the MCB Matter of Balance Team include:

Julie Boren COMS	(AER)	Regional Director
Grace Cummings COMS	(AER)	Orientation and Mobility Department
Cindy Curran COMS	(AER)	Orientation and Mobility Department
Mimi Flanary CVLT	(AER)	Social Rehabilitation Counselor
Cynthia Guise COMS	(AER)	Orientation and Mobility Department
Karen Hatcher		Older Blind Program
Meg Robertson COMS	(AER)	Orientation and Mobility Director
Cathy Webber		Social Worker/Supervisor

All of these team members have completed at least one Matter of Balance training with members from MCB's Low Vision Support Groups (working with more than 70 consumers) since 2016. These 8-week trainings have been successful and had a positive impact on the members' quality of life by reducing their fear of falling. These trainings have also kept consumers active within their

communities by using their orientation and mobility skills.

- MCB's Employment Services Supervisor, Joe Buizon was awarded the 2017 Work Without Limits Partnership Award on October 5, 2017 during the luncheon plenary session at the 5th Annual Work Without 'Raise the Bar HIRE!' conference. Attended by more than 400 people, the conference was held at the DCU Center in Worcester. The Work Without Limits Partnership Award is given annually to a professional leader who exemplifies the spirit of collaboration in advancing the employment of people with disabilities in Massachusetts. Days after suffering the loss of his mother, Joe gave an emotional acceptance speech at the conference. He spoke about how he "met some of the greatest people in his life when he was going blind," and how "what we do changes the lives of everyone."



- The 7th Annual Job Fair for Individuals with Visual Impairments, once again, saw dozens of employers who greeted a diverse group of job seekers at the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Studies at Harvard University. Charles Curti, Director of Human Resources for the Radcliffe Institute of Advanced Studies, Dean Elizabeth Cohen, and MCB Commissioner Paul Saner provided some welcoming remarks. Job seekers at this job fair differ greatly in terms of experience, education, and skill-sets, but they all have one thing in common – they are all visually impaired.

At the job fair, employers were recruiting for a variety of positions in hospitals, hotels, colleges and universities, financial institutions, museums, and more. Many on-site interviews took place and several job seekers and employers expressed their anticipation of follow-up interviews within the coming weeks. "The job fair at Radcliffe was an extraordinary networking opportunity," said job seeker, Christian Thaxton, who had the opportunity to interview with a couple of employers. He went on to state, "It enabled a pure, genuine conversation with employers, by removing the doubt of being marked incompetent by default due

solely to diversity. The experience was, without doubt, a rewarding and beneficial one.”

Jack Carroll, Director of Human Resources with Spaulding Rehabilitation Network, interviewed a number of candidates and remarked: “The candidates we interviewed were vetted in advance and came well prepared for their interviews.”

The job fair was sponsored by the VisionWorks Consortium, which consists of MCB, the Carroll Center for the Blind, and the Perkins School for the Blind. The three organizations that are a part of the consortium have pooled their employer contacts into a centralized database. This tracks the engagement stages that employers are in with job seekers who are visually impaired, increasing employment opportunities. Notably, the job fair received additional invaluable support from National Braille Press and the host of the event, Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Studies. The 2017 Job Fair was featured in *Boston Magazine* (link below).

<http://www.bostonmagazine.com/news/2017/11/07/blind-employment-boston-diversity/>

Consumer Highlights

Kane Gray (Children’s Services)



Like many puzzled teenagers, having a role model or someone who they can look up to and inspire them is an important catalyst. For Kane Gray, the honor goes to Neymar da Silva Santos Jr., who is a Brazilian professional soccer player. Kane has been playing soccer since the fifth grade when he had to leave a five-year love of street hockey due to his vision loss. Kane is legally blind and has oculocutaneous albinism, which is a condition in which the creation of melanin is lacking; he also has a history of pendulum nystagmus, which is a waveform of slow eye movements. Through the help of his friends calling his name on the field and using his peripheral vision, he distinctly navigates down the field. He was the only student to earn a second-year pin for his soccer struts and he is now a senior player for the Athol Royalston Middle School. In addition, Kane has a membership with the YMCA and he plays soccer with friends for three seasons while practicing three times per week.

His exceptional talents are evident both on and off of the field. This eighth grader is a strong advocate for himself; he learned how to become more independent with the support of his mom, Vanessa, who is another exemplar.

At thirteen years old, Kane earns an allowance by tackling chores around the house which allow him to be responsible for having his own cell phone and taking care of his own expenses. His mom has fostered his independence by setting high expectations and expanding his personal goals. Kane is responsible for choosing his own tools, at home and at school, whether it be his CCTV, Visio Book, or his own glasses to accommodate his vision essentials. He is soon to be a big brother and will continue to assist his home team and perhaps become a role model for his sister one day.

Kane is in the process of getting his MCB ID card so that he can navigate in the downtown Athol area. Through coordinating efforts, MCB has been Kane's reliable grounding source. He has also been able to attend a summer program at the Carroll Center for the Blind for four years in a row. Although Kane enjoys kayaking and riding his scooter, soccer makes the perfect hat-trick. Like Neymar, Kane is confident and he has found his voice; Kane's strong drive and fancy foot work will lead him down the fields of success.

Linda Parkhurst (Deaf-Blind Extended Supports Unit)

As a result of the 1960's German measles epidemic, Linda Parkhurst was born with Congenital Rubella Syndrome (CRS). CRS is a condition that occurs in an infant whose mother is infected with the virus that causes German measles. The term "congenital" means that the condition is present at birth. Linda, who is also Deaf Blind, attended the Mystic Oral School for the Deaf in Connecticut. When she was 5 years old, her parents transferred her to the Perkins School for the Blind and enrolled her in their Deaf Blind program. While living on campus, Linda participated in Orientation and Mobility (O & M), independent living, and American Sign Language (ASL) classes. Always feeling the need to stay busy, she worked in food preparation and laundry services on campus. When she wasn't studying, Linda was working at Brigham and Women's Hospital in Brookline. After graduation, she obtained employment at the Stockpot Restaurant in Cambridge.

In 2018, Linda will be celebrating her 30th year at Brigham and Women's Hospital. There are only two things that usually keep her from going to work: when there is a snow emergency and no public transportation; and when she is really sick. Working in the Central Transport Services Division, Linda is responsible for transporting blood

work, delivering mail, specimens, and flowers. She works expeditiously and takes great pride in her work. Although her vision has decreased, you will never hear Linda complain. She communicates using note writing and ASL at close range. She is a frequent traveler to Connecticut to visit her family. As the theme song from the 1980's popular TV show Cheers goes, when Linda travels to Connecticut, "everybody knows her name."

Linda is actively involved with the Deaf Blind Community Center and was recently voted in as a board member for 2018. With support from the Deaf Blind Community Access Network (DBCAN), Linda is maintaining her independence in the community. Loss of sight has not stopped Linda from being independent, social, or active. She has received numerous awards from Brigham and Women's. When approached about sharing her inspiring story of determination and perseverance, Linda shrugged: "I am just a normal person living a normal life." Linda may consider her life to be normal, but to others, Linda is truly a remarkable person.

Carrie Tracey (Social Rehabilitation)



Meet Carrie Tracey, an 89-year-old woman who refuses to let her age or disability slow her down. After a visual diagnosis of macular degeneration, Carrie registered with MCB in November of 2015. In addition to her vision loss, Carrie is also living with other significant health challenges. After the initial meeting with her MCB caseworker, Carrie appeared anxious and despondent about the multiple functional losses triggered

by her vision loss. Although somewhat hesitant, she was eager to explore any vision rehabilitation service that might allow her to complete certain basic daily living activities more easily.

Living in a single-family home in a seaside community north of Boston with her daughter and two grandsons, Carrie has always led an active life. She was a volunteer at her local community hospital while in her 80's, and often babysits her two grandsons when her daughter is at work. If you saw Carrie in action, it won't take long for you to realize that she cares very deeply for her family and tries to help them as much as possible.

Carrie has been determined to remain as independent as possible. Carrie and her MCB caseworker developed a vision rehabilitation plan that would address her functional losses. They agreed to explore as many devices as possible. For time management, she was given a talking desk clock and talking clock with keychain,

which she uses every day. She no longer finds it necessary to ask others, “What time is it?” Carrie has received other assistive tools which has enabled her to read recipes and frozen food package directions. She is also able to read price tags when she goes shopping with her daughter. She is amazed that she can read the newspaper again with her desktop video magnifier, a recycled model provided by MCB.

As a result of the services that Carrie has received from MCB, she has expressed her gratitude and claims that these services helped her “to not feel sorry” for herself and to resume her life as normally as possible. Talk to Carrie and you’ll see that she is now more hopeful about her future as an older person with vision loss.

Anthony Bynum (VR – Pre-ETS)



Anthony Bynum is looking forward to graduating from high school in the summer of 2018 and starting the next chapter of his life by beginning his college career. He hopes to pursue a Bachelor’s Degree in Information Technology. As a Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) consumer, he has participated in numerous programs that have afforded him the opportunity to learn many valuable skills. In 2017, Anthony participated in the Perkins Outreach Program that included a 5-Week World of Work Program, Camp Abilities, Adaptive Ski Festival, Space Camp, and Winter Vacation Theater Program.

He also participated in the Our Space Our Place after school program, an eight-week culinary class, and the Visions of Achievement program.

Anthony, who is legally blind due to albinism, has needed to use adaptive technology to access his high school curriculum. He also receives orientation and mobility services at school and in his community to aid in his independence. Anthony’s Teacher of the Visually Impaired (TVI), Nalida Besson, who has worked with Anthony over the past few years, describes him as: “an intelligent student with strengths in technology as well as independent living and vocational skills. He’s a fast learner and will be successful next year in college and beyond.”

When Anthony reflects on his experiences, he reports: “I am always taking the first steps in experiencing new things as you never know where these experiences might lead to.” J. Patrick Ryan, Supervisor of Outreach at Perkins School for the Blind, commented that: “Since starting in Outreach, Anthony has developed strong connections with his peers, as well as an impressive set of skills to offer in the world of

higher education and competitive employment. He is a bright and enthusiastic young man and it has been a pleasure to watch him grow and discover his capabilities.”

Kathy Taylor (VR)



Kathy Taylor has spent most of her professional career as a software technical writer. When she started struggling with her vision approximately six years ago, Kathy assumed it was simply a case of age-related vision loss. After leaving Oracle to start a new job with another software development company, she noticed that her vision was deteriorating and she could not ignore it any longer. “I was having difficulties recognizing people and struggling to navigate around the workplace,” recalls Kathy. Taking advice from one of her colleagues, she decided to seek some professional help. Kathy saw a slew of ophthalmologists during a three-year period. No one could accurately diagnose her condition.

In the summer of 2017, Kathy was finally diagnosed with occult maculopathy. Kathy described her condition as a fancy way of saying “something is wrong with my macular.” She found herself at a crossroad. Transitioning with her vision loss was a difficult experience for her. She felt like it was an endless journey. Since her profession consisted of reading and writing for long hours at a computer each day, she thought her prospect for being able to continue working was slim. On one hand, she felt hopeless and was ready to retire. On the other hand, Kathy said: “I am a fighter, I am better than this, and I will not let it (her vision loss) beat me!” Recognizing that she needed some help, she registered with MCB and explored available services.

As a result of her legal blindness, Kathy’s employer allowed her to work from home as often as she needs to do so. MCB had provided Kathy with assistive technology equipment and she is learning the skills that she needs to keep doing her job. She is using Zoomtext and a large monitor at work. She also uses a portable and desktop CCTV. These devices are proving invaluable for Kathy. She carries the portable CCTV with her laptop back and forth between her workplace and home office. She uses her CCTV for reading drafts and notes and for editing hard copy. Kathy’s story is another example of how technology can level the playing field for individuals who have a visual impairment.

If you have any questions regarding MCB services, comments about this report, or know of someone who would like to receive this report electronically, please call (or have them call) 617-626-7503 or email us at Officeofthecommissioner@massmail.state.ma.us. Please include your name, telephone number and town of residence.